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TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [KZ](#)
SUBJECT: NAC MEETING WITH KAZAKHSTAN DEFENSE MINISTER
AKHMETOV

Classified By: CDA W. S. Reid, III, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During his comments to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) Kazakhstan, Defense Minister (DEFMIN) Danial Akhmetov extolled Kazakhstan's defense and domestic reforms and announced contributions to ISAF. Allies acknowledged Kazakhstan's progress, but pressed for further assistance and posed questions about fundamental human rights, particularly in view of Astana's upcoming OSCE chairmanship. END SUMMARY.

A Bridge between West and East

¶2. (C) During the October 15 meeting of the NAC, DEFMIN Akhmetov reacted to NATO's assessment of Kazakhstan's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), stressing Kazakhstan's priorities of increasing interaction with NATO, Europe and the United States. He emphasized that Kazakhstan's decision to host the 2009 EAPC Security Forum is indicative of the importance Kazakhstan places on its relationship with NATO.

¶3. (C) Akhmetov said that Kazakhstan's two biggest defense reform priorities are modernization of the armed forces and fostering the ability to participate in peacekeeping operations, hopefully by 2010. He asserted that the army had been transformed by implementing a new force structure, procuring better equipment, increasing personnel capabilities and training its brigades (KAZBAT and KAZBRIG) to be more NATO-interoperable, as proven in the recent STEPPE EAGLE exercise. Akhmetov said that Kazakhstan will open its Partnership for Peace training center in 2010. He pointed out that better use needs to be made of the clearinghouse mechanism to avoid unnecessary duplication. Akhmetov reminded PermReps that Kazakhstan had supported ISAF operations since 2003, including granting overflight licenses for 6000 NATO aircraft. Moreover, Kazakhstan allowed 80 flights to land due to in-flight emergencies. He stated that the draft surface transit agreement will be approved. Having already donated almost USD 3 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan this year, Akhmetov announced the deployment of two staff officers and a medical unit to ISAF. As part of coalition forces in Iraq (not part of the NATO effort), Kazakhstani troops have disarmed 6 million pieces of ammunition and saved 500 lives (Note: Akhmetov did not elaborate as to how these lives were saved. End note.) In addition, he said that Kazakhstan had contributed one person to work on the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination

Centre for one year, held a NATO-Kazakhstan Partnership Week in April, hosted a visit of the executive office of the NATO Parliamentarians Assembly in June, and opened a NATO depository at the National Library in Astana.

¶4. (C) Addressing the domestic situation, DEFMIN Akhmetov proudly stated that during its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, Kazakhstan wants to demonstrate that it truly is the "bridge between West and East." He said that Kazakhstan is working on the further democratization of civil society and creating the legal mechanisms necessary for further electoral and judicial reforms. He said Kazakhstan wants to foster more transparency in the judicial system and create more local courts. He boasted that Kazakhstan's economy had exhibited a growth rate of 9-10 percent each of the last few years, with 5 percent this year. He said that the energy sector was the driving force behind Kazakhstan's economy, and noted that the country sees itself as not just a regional supplier of energy, but a global supplier. Akhmetov said that Kazakhstan was committed to maintaining itself as a "responsible and reliable" energy partner and values the need for energy infrastructure security.

Positive steps, but what else can you offer?

¶5. (C) In a reference to Kazakhstan's ever-increasing relationship with NATO, the U.S. thanked Kazakhstan for "physically shortening the distance" between NATO and Astana with this high-level visit. The U.S. also expressed thanks for Kazakhstan's support to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan,

welcoming Akhmetov's announcement of the decision to deploy the staff officers. However, the U.S. also pressed for using the staff officers as a bridge to later deployment of a larger group to ISAF and quick finalization of the draft surface transit agreement (Note: The Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Norway, Latvia, Greece and Estonia also reinforced the transit agreement message. End note.) The U.S. stated its hope that Kazakhstan can quickly finalize the necessary NAMSO immunities required for the U.S.-led Trust Fund to commence work, or warned that it risks the expiration of funds provided to the Trust Fund. The Netherlands, which serves as the Contact Point Embassy for Kazakhstan, declared that NATO-Kazakhstan relations had progressed considerably in the last few years, but raised concerns about freedom of religion and the media. Many Allies asked Akhmetov what Kazakhstan can contribute to energy security. Germany urged Kazakhstan to serve as a role model and an honest broker "in its troubled region" in its capacity as upcoming chair of the OSCE. Several Allies asked about public diplomacy efforts in Kazakhstan, its role in the CSTO, and its thoughts on the Georgia conflict. Norway announced its intention to open an embassy in Astana next year.

Akhmetov's rebuttal

¶6. (C) Responding to questions about the domestic situation, Akhmetov said that the biggest contribution Kazakhstan can make in the field of energy security is diversification of routes through the expansion and construction of pipelines. As evidence that Kazakhstan promotes the freedom of religion, Akhmetov reported that, in 2009, Kazakhstan will host a Catholic inter-faith religious conference. He stated that Kazakhstan is amending media legislation to provide for free access to information by the public and anti-monopoly laws. It is also amending laws to accommodate the information security agreement it signed with NATO in 1997, which answered a U.S. question on more transparent provision of information for Planning and Review Process/IPAP, and to strengthen the role of parliament. Akhmetov added that Kazakhstan's historical traditions must be respected, but they can be brought in accordance with international community standards.

¶7. (C) In regards to external relations, Akhmetov said that the CSTO is a positive contributor to regional security, which offers added-value in tackling religious extremism and terrorism, creating rapid reaction arrangements, and integrating airspace. He answered that the conflict in Georgia had not affected Kazakhstan's relationship with Russia in the CSTO. Akhmetov said that he wished the UN and OSCE mechanisms had been better implemented, and expressed hope that the six-point Medvedev-Sarkozy plan will soon be implemented. He underlined Kazakh investment in Georgia's energy and service sectors, saying they were important and would continue.

¶8. (C) DEFMIN Akhmetov offered that the most important relief Kazakhstan can provide Afghanistan is economic assistance, as it has already done in repairing schools, hospitals and roads. Twice he said Kazakhstan regretted losing recent mining tenders, but would stay active in that sector in Afghanistan. He said that the deployment of two staff officers is "only the beginning" of the support Kazakhstan can offer ISAF, but that Kazakhstan does not think Afghanistan's problems ultimately have military solutions.

REID